

REMARKS

The Office Action dated October 1, 2004 and the references cited therein have been carefully considered. In view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks, it is submitted that the application is in condition for allowance.

The Office Action objected to claims 6, 7, and 10 for informalities therein. Applicants have amended these claims in view of the suggestions in the Office Action.

The application was filed with claims 1-10. The Office Action rejected claims 1-7 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over the cited prior art. Specifically, claims 1-3 were rejected as being unpatentable over Mueller (U.S. Patent 2,374,032) in view of Moulton (U.S. Patent 5,550,724). Claims 4-7 were rejected as being unpatentable over Mueller in view of Moulton further in view of Trulaske (U.S. Patent 5,584,547). Nevertheless, the Office Action indicated that claims 8-10 would have been allowable if written in independent form.

Applicants respectfully submit that the claimed invention of claims 1-7 as amended are rendered obvious by the cited references. This is because (1) the cited references when combined still do not have all the elements of the claims, and (2) it would not have been obvious for one skilled in the art to combine them.

Specifically, the Office Action asserted that Mueller discloses conductive end caps sealingly affixed to the tube ends in contact with the leads and forming plug ends for the tubes. Contrary to the Office Action's assertion, however, Mueller does not disclose the conductive end caps required by the claims. This is because Mueller is directed to lamp holders for a fluorescent lamp, not a neon lamp as called for by the claims. It is well-known that fluorescent lamps and neon lamps have different structures and operate in different ways. In particular, the fluorescent

In re Appln. of Denison et al.
Application No. 10/616,656

amp 1 of Mueller does not have conductive leads projecting from its ends. Since there are no such conductive leads, the fluorescent lamp cannot have “conductive end caps” that are in contact with the leads projecting from the ends of the lamp tube. In the regard, applicants point out that the Office Action was incorrect in identifying the contact 2 in FIGS. 1 and 2 of Mueller as the “conductive end cap.” As stated in Mueller, the contact 2 is an oval-shaped contact for insertion into a lamp holder. *See* Muller, col. 1, lines 31-33. It does not cover the end of the fluorescent lamp tube and thus is not an end cap.

Also, Mueller does not teach boot end receptacles that can be snapped on to or off from the plug ends formed by the conductive end caps on the neon lamp tube. As explained in Mueller, the fluorescent lamp 1 is mounted in its holders by inserting the oval-shaped contact 2 edgewise into the holders, and then turning the lamp through an angle of 90 degrees to bring the oval-shaped contacts to a position transverse to the lamp holders. Even if the holder 5 of Mueller should be considered to be the “boot end receptacles,” they cannot be snapped onto or off from the contact, as called for by the claims.

In this regard, the Office Action asserted that Mueller teaches all the elements in claim 1 except a neon lamp. The Office Action, however, only referred to FIGS. 1 and 2 of Mueller generally and did not explicitly identify each of the claim elements in those drawings. If the next Office Action should maintain the same ground of rejections, the Examiner is respectfully requested to explicitly identify each of the claim element in the cited references, in order to facilitate further proceedings of the prosecution.

Both independent claims 1 and 6 as amended include the limitations discussed above. Since those limitations are not taught or suggested by the cited references, the combination of

In re Appln. of Denison et al.
Application No. 10/616,656

Mueller and Moulton and/or Trulaske would not be sufficient to establish a Section 103 case.

Accordingly, all the claims should be allowed for at least this reason.

As to claim 2, the Office Action asserted that it would have been obvious to replace the holder 5 of Mueller with the flexible heat-resistant material of Moulton. Applicants respectfully submit such replacement would not have been obvious because it would not work. The holder 5 of Mueller, with its spring loaded mounting mechanism inside, would require a rigid structure. Indeed, Mueller states that the holder may be made of porcelain. Mueller, col. 1, lines 45. Thus, constructing the holder of Mueller with a flexible material would take away the structural rigidity and render the holder unusable. Accordingly, it would not have been obvious for one skilled in the art to try to combine the holder of Mueller with the flexible material of Moulton as suggested by the Office Action.

In re Appln. of Denison et al.
Application No. 10/616,656

Conclusion

The application is considered in good and proper form for allowance, and the Examiner is respectfully requested to pass this application to issue. If, in the opinion of the Examiner, a telephone conference would expedite the prosecution of the subject application, the Examiner is invited to call the undersigned attorney.

Respectfully submitted,



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